

Once Upon a Snoggletog

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Summary: Hiccup's first Snoggletog as chief of Berk. Featuring an assignment, a gift, a question, and a little too much mead.

1. Chapter 1

Hiccup's first Snoggletog as chief of Berk. Featuring an assignment, a gift, a question, and a little too much mead.

Chapter 1:

This is Snoggletog: a mid-winter excuse for drunkenness, carousing, scandalous stories, and more than a few neighborly brawls. For as long as parents have lived in Berk, they've taught their children that Snoggletog is a season to celebrate with the rest of the village, and for as long as children have lived in Berk, they've annually looked forward to making their own contributions to the general mayhem.

We have eating (not enough of that), drinking (far too much of that), games (usually of the indoor variety), and worst of all, dancing. No girl in her right mind would ever consent to dancing the Snoggletog jig with a one-legged boy. And no one-legged boy (or man) should ever ask . . . unless, of course, your name is Gobber and you can blame all ungainly stumbles on excessive consumption of mead.

But as boisterous and chaotic and miserable as Snoggletog sounds (and it is), there is one good thing about it: the exchanging of gifts. Some gifts are useful: new tools, weapons, clothing, food, or promised help with a difficult task. Some are ridiculous, like the year my dad gave me a war drum made of dragon bones and skin that I couldn't even lift. Other gifts are highly symbolic: the best black eye I've ever seen was Ruffnut's gift to Snotlout after he gave her a mouse pelt. Dad never did explain to me what that was supposed to mean.

But this year, this year, Snoggletog is going to be different. Because this year I will actually have something to celebrate. That is, if I can finish this gift in time.

"What's that yu're workin' on there, Hiccup?"

I drop the pliers with a clang and turn around, hands behind my back. Gobber, having once again startled me, is leaning against the wall, arm nonchalantly crossed over stump.

"N- nothing," I stammer, trying to hide both my embarrassment and my project. I wish I didn't stammer; it's undignified, and as chief, I need all the dignity I can muster.

"Oh, really?" he persists. "I haven't seen ya spend so much time in yer little corner since ya were in Dragon Training all those years ago."

"Fine," I relent, "if you must know, it's a project." If I'm lucky, that much will satisfy his curiosity.

I am not lucky.

"And what kind of project would occupy so much of yer time that ye've forgotten about decoratin' the Hall?" Now Gobber is leaning his good arm on the anvil and wagging his stump in my face.

The new subject is a straw which I grasp eagerly. "The Hall? I asked Ruff and Tuff to organize decorations."

"That's precisely what I mean, Hiccup," he protests. "Those two are more likely to destroy it than decorate it."

The words slip out before I can stop them. "Destruction or decoration, it can't look any worse than it usually does." Sarcasm will be my undoing someday.

"Oh, so while yu're busy, the twins burn the Hall to the ground in their overwhelming enthusiasm ta help."

Gobber is peeved. I can see it in his posture and hear it in his tone. That means disaster is either imminent or already upon us.

"If you like, Gobber, why don't you go supervise?" I suggest, hoping against hope he'll take the hint.

No such luck. "Well that just brings me back ta mah question: what are ya doin' that's takin' so much time away from ya preparin' for the celebration?"

"I - I can't tell you, Gobber. It's a secret." It sounds lame, I know, but Gobber's wasting my time and I need to finish this project. His face falls; it's been about five years since the last time I kept a secret from Gobber. "I'm sorry. Look, why don't you go help decorate the Hall?" His look of consternation tells me I've said the wrong thing. "Tell the twins I sent you. I'm sure they could use some help, you know how much they fight."

Gobber's still not happy with me. "Well, all right, Hiccup. I just thought ya might confide in me . . . like yer father did."

Now he's making me feel guilty. One more failure to add to the growing list.

"Ya know, if ya ever need any help, ye can always ask. Anytime."

"Thanks, Gobber," I reply, avoiding eye contact and not trusting myself to say more. He hesitates, then finally leaves, grumbling something inaudible.

That makes one more reason to dislike Snoggletog: decorating the Hall can lead to hurt feelings. I sigh, retrieve the pliers, and turn back to my work.

2. Chapter 2

Once Upon a Snoggletog

Hiccup's first Snoggletog as chief of Berk. Featuring an assignment, a gift, a question, and a little too much mead.

Chapter 2:

A chief has to be humble and able to admit mistakes. Gobber seems to have taken my comment about decorations as a challenge, and this year I will be the first to admit I was wrong: the Hall is beautiful, inside and out. Perhaps I will give him and the twins the job again in the future. Not only is it hung with greenery and illuminated with artfully-placed candles, the missing shingles on the roof have been replaced and there seems to be a fresh coat of paint glistening on every surface.

As the festivities begin, I take my seat at the head of the table, anxiously scanning the crowd of faces. She will be here at any moment, ready to take her place at my side. As of yet, and like so many other things, the position is still symbolic. Not for long.

There. I can see her bright blue eyes, her golden hair shining in the candlelight. For the first time I can remember, she's left leather, studs, and rodent skulls at home; tonight she's wearing a dress. It's simple, red cloth with fur at wrists, hemline, and collar, but I think it's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. She is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

As she approaches the table, I take her hand and bow slightly. "Good evening, m'lady," I manage. It's hard to take my eyes off of her. She smiles in return and sits gracefully. Finally wrenching my eyes away, I raise my hands and declare, in the most booming voice I can muster (which doesn't boom at all), "Let the celebration begin."

With a hearty roar of approval, the village sets to. Mead flows freely, children scamper about shrieking happily, and before long Gobber begins singing loudly, if slightly off-key, a catchy ditty about two Viking lovers. I tap my fingers in time with the merry tune. Maybe Snoggletog isn't as bad as I used to think.

Earlier I felt nervous. Now, surrounded by friends, family, and my

people, I'm feeling almost relaxed. Maybe that's an effect of the mead. And every time I look over at Astrid, she seems a little bit prettier. She's enjoying herself, chatting with mom and stealing occasional glances at me. Judging the time to be right, I try to catch her eye, but she's very intent on her mutton and Tuffnut's ongoing account of his adventures replacing the shingles. I pay him little heed: it's noisy in the Hall, and my head is getting slightly buzzy with the heat and the food and the mead. And I really need to ask Astrid a question.

After several attempts to get her attention, I grab Astrid's hand and lead her away from the table. She glances at me questioningly, but makes no protest as I lead her behind one of the pillars.

I'm nervous again; I'm ready for this, I've practiced it, but now that the moment's finally come, I'm scared. Terrified, actually. Still holding Astrid's hand in mine, I kneel and her eyes widen.

"Astrid," I begin.

"Um, Hiccup," she falters, but now that I've started I can't stop for anything.

"Let me finish," I plead. She looks like she wants to say something else, but like the good woman she is, she allows me to continue. "The past few months have been . . . difficult . . . for everybody, what with rebuilding the village and making room for all the new dragons and . . . being chief . . . but I wanted to thank you for how supportive you've been." This isn't really going how I planned it and Astrid's beginning to look distinctly uncomfortable. "You've been by my side for all of it and I need to ask you if--"

Then Tuffnut pokes his head around the pillar and interrupts. "Hey, Hiccup, did you know you're kneeling in a puddle?"

I look down; sure enough, there's a sticky, discolored puddle under my knee, and it's currently soaking through my trousers. How did I not notice that? "Eww. What is it, Tuff?" I ask, unable to keep the irritation out of my voice. Astrid's expression has gone from uncomfortable to pained.

"It's probably some of the pine sap I used on the shingles this morning. I didn't know it would do that when it melted. Cool!" With that, Tuffnut saunters away, whistling along with Gobber's ditty. There's a drunken wobble in his step.

"I'm sorry, Hiccup," Astrid begins. "I really wanted to tell you."

Oh, this is just great. Now I can feel the disgusting goop dripping into my hair. "Okay, that's it. This is the last time the twins do anything in the Great Hall!" I holler. The outburst brings me to my feet, ready to kill Tuffnut.

To my surprise, Astrid begins to laugh. "I'm sorry, Hiccup," she says through her chuckles. "Of all the ridiculous positions you've ever been in, this one might be the worst."

"That's easy for you to say; you're not the one with pine sap in your

hair and trousers." It might be because of my irritation, but it is definitely getting warmer in this building.

Astrid attempts to get her laughter under control, though she's still smiling broadly. Odin, she is so beautiful.

"What was it you were going to ask me?" she asks, wiping away tears of mirth.

Mustering what dignity I have left, I again kneel, this time taking pains to choose a clean bit of floor. I reach into my pocket to remove my gift for her, the one I've worked so hard to perfect. It catches on the cloth of my trousers and, impatient, I tug. The metal is strong, much stronger than my clothing, and a bit of my trousers comes away in one long tear.

I may go back to hating Snoggletog.

"Here," I say shortly, my hair a sticky mess, my trousers ripped, and my evening just about ruined, "this is for you." I hold it up to her with my eyes now glued to the floor.

"Oh, Hiccup," she breathes. It's a bracelet, copper and steel worked in strands that twist around and over each other. The clasp pictures two tiny dragons whose wings interlock. "It's beautiful."

The tone of her voice gives me the courage to meet her gaze. "What I wanted to ask, Astrid, was this: will you marry me?"

She doesn't answer immediately; instead, she places her right hand in my left, and I thread the bracelet onto her strong but delicate wrist. Her eyes shining, she whispers "Yes," then throws her arms around me, pine sap and ripped trousers notwithstanding. It's warmer than ever in the Hall.

Then Gobber, now definitely inebriated, pokes not just his head, but his whole stomping, stumpy self around the pillar and smacks me on the back. "Ya know, Hiccup," he slurs, wheezing and out of breath, "thanks fer puttin' me in charge of the twins. That Tuffnut sher knows what he's doin' repairin' shingles; I never would'a thought of puttin' sap all over the inside of the Hall."

I know where this conversation is going, and I can't bear to hear more. Once again grabbing Astrid's hand, I duck around Gobber's attempt at a hug, and we make our escape.

Outside the Hall the air is bracingly cold, fresh, and invigorating. I'm still holding Astrid's hand and she's stroking my arm lovingly. "What did Tuffnut do?" I ask, still trying to make sense of what just happened.

"Don't worry about it, love," Astrid cooes. She's still stroking my arm, and it's getting harder to think clearly. The noise from the Hall is growing louder, angrier, and my head is buzzing more than ever. "We'll sort it all out in the morning," Astrid whispers in my ear, then she kisses me. It's even warmer outside than it was inside.

After the kiss, the buzzing in my head changes to a low purring, just like the noise Toothless makes when I scratch under his chin. But

Toothless isn't here, it's just me and Astrid and our future together and the sounds of outrage and mayhem in the Hall.

This is Snoggletog: we celebrate the season with love, practical jokes, and animosity in equal measure. We eat, drink, play, fight, we go on living because we have each other. In the dead of winter, when the snow buries everything else, we surround ourselves with those we love, because then we find warmth and joy.

I don't remember much about that Snoggletog, except that it was the best ever, because the bravest, smartest, most beautiful woman I know said yes.

And, I might have had a little too much mead.

The End

End
file.